



### **THREE DECADES OF COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS RESULT IN THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE'S PROPOSAL TO DELIST THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE AREA POPULATION OF GRIZZLY BEARS**

- Today we celebrate an extraordinary accomplishment in the history of American conservation. The greater Yellowstone area population of grizzly bears – a population that was once plummeting towards extinction – is now recovered.
- As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove this population from the list of threatened and endangered species. The future of this great icon of the West is assured. Our grandchildren's grandchildren will see grizzly bears roaming Yellowstone.
- This is an extraordinary accomplishment because the task of recovering this great species was so difficult. It could only be accomplished through close cooperation between the federal government, state wildlife agencies, local communities, private landowners, experts from universities, and other partners.
- Working together, we have been able to achieve what we could never have done by ourselves. We have dramatically increased the number of grizzlies in the Yellowstone area. We have ensured these bears will have the habitat they need. We have developed a comprehensive management plan that will ensure the species long-term conservation once the species is delisted.
- Grizzly bears once flourished in the West. When Lewis and Clark made their historic journey, there were more than 50,000 grizzlies across the West. They reported numerous encounters with grizzlies, including a few frightening episodes where they underestimated the speed and strength of these great animals.
- Unfortunately, the next century and half saw a rapid decline in the number of grizzlies. By the early 1970s, there were believed to be less than 1,000 grizzlies left in the continental United States. They occupied only 2 percent of their historic range.
- When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the bear as threatened in 1975, biologist estimate there were only 220 to 320 grizzlies remaining in the Yellowstone ecosystem. This number was dropping fast due to loss of habitat and conflicts between humans and bears, ending in the death of the bear.
- Fortunately, the plight of the grizzly bear in Yellowstone inspired a spirit of cooperative conservation that has been instrumental to its recovery. Two years before it was even listed under the Endangered Species Act, a team of federal, state, and university biologists convened to determine how government agencies could work together with private landowners to reverse the decline. When the species was listed in 1975, this cooperation continued, culminating in the creation of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee in 1983.

- Each partner has played a vital role. As the lead agency with responsible for threatened and endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented cooperative recovery efforts to limit human-caused bear mortalities, reduce conflicts on public and private lands, and develop monitoring systems for bears to determine status and identify threats.
- The National Park Service instituted intensive sanitation efforts throughout Yellowstone and Grand Teton National parks to limit conflicts between humans and bears, the leading cause of bear mortality. The Park Service also protected key habitats through the management of areas heavily used by bears.
- The USDA-Forest Service took a number of steps including placing bear resistant garbage containers in all forest campgrounds and engaging in intensive outreach to forest visitors. The Forest Service also closed sheep allotments in areas of continuing human-bear conflict and closed roads in key habitat areas. The agency also worked closely with state bear managers to resolve conflicts that involve human safety and possible grizzly mortalities. In addition, the Forest Service is amending its forest plans to assure appropriate management of the bear's habitat after delisting.
- The U.S. Geological Survey led the effort to develop the sound science that is the basis for the management and recovery of the Yellowstone population. In addition, the agency has produced more than 170 reports and publications that have helped guide bear conservation on the ground.
- Environmental organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation and Defenders of Wildlife have contributed significantly to grizzly recovery. For example, they have contributed significant amounts of money to reimburse ranchers for livestock losses. They have also paid ranchers to move off of livestock allotments on public lands where there have been repeated livestock-grizzly conflicts.
- The states of Wyoming and Montana hired full-time grizzly bear management specialists and conducted outreach efforts to reduce human-bear conflicts. Wyoming established a comprehensive bear monitoring program costing \$1 million a year in direct and indirect costs per year.
- Meanwhile, Idaho developed community-based information and education programs to minimize conflicts and involve the public in bear conservation. Idaho also minimized human-bear conflicts related to sanitation issues and increased law enforcement efforts to limit illegal killing of bears.
- Professional Outfitters contributed by teaching a bear safety course in Wyoming that is mandatory to licensed guides and outfitters. In Montana, all licensed guides and outfitters in grizzly habitat must adhere to food storage regulations and bear safety regulations. Outfitters also assisted in design and development of bear-resistant electric fencing to minimize conflicts.
- Finally, private landowners worked with state and federal agencies to better manage habitat and to reduce conflicts with bears.
- The sum of all these efforts and all these partnerships brought us to where we are today. The recovery of the Yellowstone grizzly population underscores again that the federal government can do far more for threatened and endangered species by working in cooperation with states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and other partners than we can do by ourselves. In short, we have worked together and we have succeeded together.

